

NEW GEOTOURISM MAPGUIDE SPOTLIGHTS ‘CROWN OF THE CONTINENT’
Map Celebrates Authentic Places of U.S.-Canada Rocky Mountain Region

WASHINGTON (March 29, 2008)—Travelers who seek unspoiled places and culturally authentic experiences have a valuable new resource in a “Geotourism MapGuide” for the Rocky Mountain region surrounding Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, including areas in Alberta, British Columbia and Montana. The community-based map, developed by the National Geographic Society and dozens of regional partners, highlights the Crown of the Continent region’s distinctive environmental, cultural and historical character and points to ways that visitors and residents can sustain and enhance regional assets. The MapGuide will be unveiled Saturday, March 29, at the Adventures in Travel Expo in Washington, D.C.

The Crown of the Continent region encompasses northern Montana, southeastern British Columbia, southwestern Alberta, as well as five tribal and First Nation reserves. It also includes two World Heritage sites: Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, straddling the Montana-Alberta border, and Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump near Fort McLeod, Alberta.

“The objective of the MapGuide is to showcase the region’s most unique points of interest and to tell the broader story of a remarkable landscape beyond borders,” said Jonathan Tourtellot, director of National Geographic’s Center for Sustainable Destinations and senior editor for the map. “The Crown of the Continent is one of the most intact natural ecosystems in the temperate zones of the world. It is a place of plunging valleys, sweet water, ancient cedar forests, native prairie and diverse wildlife. It’s also a place with a rich cultural heritage: Sovereign First Nations still occupy the same territory after thousands of years, alongside loggers, ranchers, miners and more recently an influx of new residents who have brought far-flung business ventures and incomes. This map tells the stories tied to this very special landscape.”

The MapGuide is a collaboration of National Geographic Maps, the Center for Sustainable Destinations and numerous regional partners serving as the Crown of the Continent Geotourism Council.

“The MapGuide and companion Web site, www.crownofthecontinent.net, will highlight ways that people can sustain the region’s natural and cultural assets for future generations,” said Steve Thompson of the National Parks Conservation Association, who coordinated the community-based mapping process. “People are passionate about protecting what we have here, and this map provides plenty of options.”

Volunteers can help repair wilderness trails, pull invading noxious weeds at a community weed-whacking rodeo, catch non-native fish to preserve waters for native species and participate in historic preservation projects. Visitors can enrich their experience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by

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catching a shuttle bus in Glacier or by riding Amtrak. Newcomers moving to the region are encouraged to live close to town rather than converting traditional ranches, forests and wildlife habitat for real estate development. Visitors to the Web site can also order a free copy of the printed MapGuide.

Montana Governor Brian Schweitzer said the map celebrates the region's great landscapes, friendly communities and fascinating cultural heritage. "Montana's great attraction is that we still offer experiences and values that have been lost so many other places. It's been our pleasure to partner with National Geographic to celebrate the Crown of the Continent. We are committed to working with our local communities, visitors and Canadian partners to be good stewards of this very special place."

"Geotourism is the future of travel in unspoiled places such as southeast British Columbia," said Chris Dadson, president of Kootenay Rockies Tourism. "More than 55 million American travelers alone say they look for authenticity and a distinctive destination character to immerse themselves in when they travel, and that will do nothing but grow."

Duncan Daniels, official of the Alberta Ministry of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture, said the region offers a remarkable blend of wild nature, cultural experiences and a living heritage that goes back thousands of years. "With two very different World Heritage sites so close to each other, visitors can experience many dimensions of humanity's ongoing relationship with the natural world," he said. Daniels noted that the dozens of regional partners who helped create the map intend to continue the partnership to educate visitors, promote visitor experiences and protect the region's distinctive values.

The Crown of the Continent map is the fourth geotourism MapGuide developed by the National Geographic Society. Earlier maps explored Appalachia, the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont, and the Sonoran Desert region of southern Arizona and Mexico. Other projects are under way in Baja California, Peru and the greater Yellowstone region of Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

Geotourism is defined as "tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place — its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage and the well-being of its residents." A major 2002 Geotourism Study by National Geographic Traveler magazine and the Travel Industry Association of America found that at least 55 million American adults can be classified as "geotourists," a strong incentive for regions to protect and enhance natural and cultural assets for future visitors.

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Additional Voices from Montana about the Crown of the Continent Geotourism MapGuide Project

Comments from some of the hundreds of Montanans who helped produce this map in partnership with National Geographic Society

Corlene Martin, Choteau, Coordinator of the Montana Scenic Loop, (406) 466-5784

"The opportunity to work with National Geographic on the MapGuide has been energizing for many of the small towns in this region. This supports the best kind of economic development for rural communities, focused on preserving rather than exploiting our natural world and way of life." *The Montana Scenic Loop is a non-profit organization that represents small businesses, federal land managers, and communities along the scenic highways that circle the Bob Marshall Wilderness.*

Rhonda Fitzgerald, Whitefish, Owner-operator of the Garden Wall Inn, (406) 862-3440

"I've seen the authentic character of too many places get flushed down the drain once they've been discovered by an influx of new residents and travelers. Places that were once authentic and interesting end up looking like anyplace else. We've been lucky that hasn't happened here yet, but the potential certainly exists. With this map, we want to reach those visitors who are hungry for unique experiences and want to help maintain local character. And it's important for Montanans to know that visitors can be part of the solution."

Anne Dahl, Condon, Director of the Swan Ecosystem Center, (406) 754-3137

"When travelers stop by the Center, they always seem interested in the ecology and history of the Swan Valley and its connections to the Bob Marshall and Mission Mountain wilderness areas. This region is so large and complex that it's difficult for people to put their arms around it. This map helps people see the bigger picture of history, culture and wildlife and how we're connected across borders. It's wonderful that National Geographic has highlighted some of the local stewardship initiatives to maintain our open lands, habitat, and traditions."

Tony Incashola, St. Ignatius, Director of the Salish-Pend Oreille Cultural Committee, (406) 745-4572

"This mapping project helps tell the story of our people. The Salish, Pend Oreille, and Kootenai people have been in this place for a long time. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes integrate our cultural values and heritage into our environmental and natural resource management on the Flathead Reservation and throughout our aboriginal territories."

Cheryl Thompson, Director, Seeley Lake Chamber of Commerce, (406) 677-2880

"Our community was eager to participate in this project. Our beautiful area is attracting growing numbers of visitors and residents, so we see this map as an educational tool to help people tread lightly and even give back to the environment."

Attention Print Media: Excellent electronic-format stock images of the Crown of the Continent region are available from Donnie Sexton, Travel Montana, 406-841-2897, dsexton@mt.gov

Attention Broadcast Media: B-Roll video is available in DVD or Beta SP format, or can be converted to a Quicktime Movie. Contact Tia at Partners Creative at 406-541-2263 or tia@partnerscreative.com

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